
Our Paper: Serving the Alternative Community

Periodicals

Spring 4-1984

Our Paper 04/1984

Our Paper

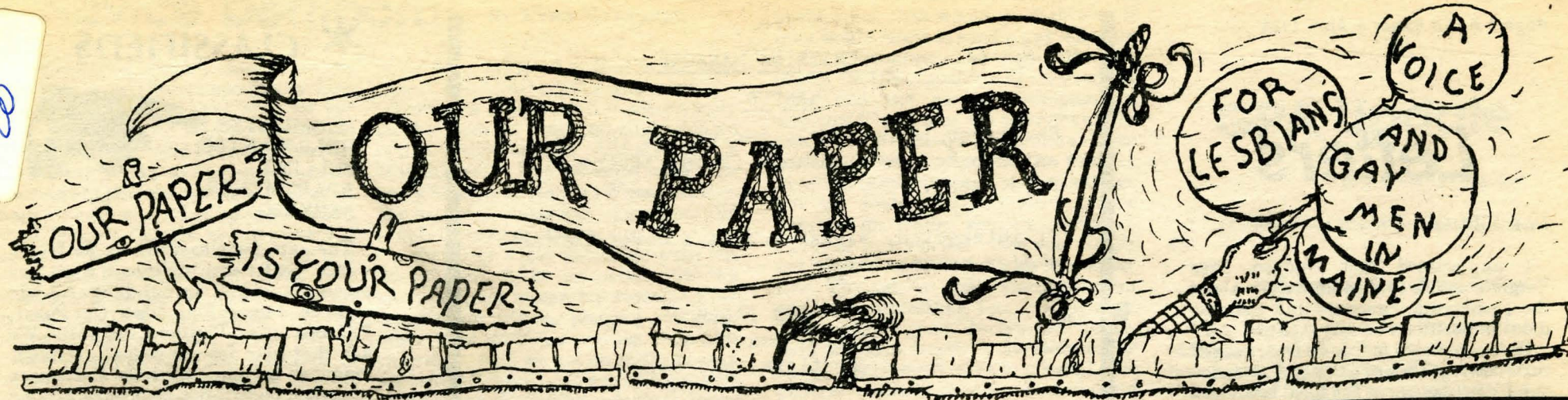
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Vol. 1 No. 8

April 1984

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Gay Delegates

Efforts at the March 4th caucuses to elect gay and lesbian delegates to the State Democratic Convention met with success. Although the lack of an organized gay political group makes counting difficult, an informal poll shows that at least one dozen gay or lesbian delegates and a similar number of alternates were elected. Approximately half of these came from the Portland area but others were elected from Bangor and from small towns throughout the state. Approximately three quarters of those elected favored Gary Hart and more than half were women. Among those elected were Phil Gautreau (uncommitted delegate), Fred Berger (Hart alternate), John Preston (Hart alternate), and Dale McCormick (Hart delegate).

The next step toward a unified gay presence at the convention (May 4-6) is for these and other gay and lesbian delegates and alternates to meet together. To that end, JoAnn D'Auphinee, a veteran of several conventions, conducted a workshop on gay politics at Symposium XI. A follow-up meeting for all Portland area gay and lesbian delegates and alternates will be held on Wednesday, April 18 at 7:30 p.m. at Our Books, 4 Pine Street, Portland.

Delegates and alternates who cannot attend these meetings are urged to contact the others through *Our Paper* and to look for a "visible gay presence" at the convention. Alternates are reminded of the importance of attending the convention. As many delegates do not attend, or are absent from certain sessions, alternates are very often called upon to take their place in important votes. Remember, there is strength in numbers — and we are some "hot numbers"!

Thoughts on Being A Gay Parent

By N.A.

Being the other lesbian parent is in many ways just like being a "straight parent." It's amazing that your body comes down with the same types of ear infections as theirs do, that either baby has the ability to keep you up all night when they are sick. And best of all, your baby's diapers smell just as bad as theirs do.

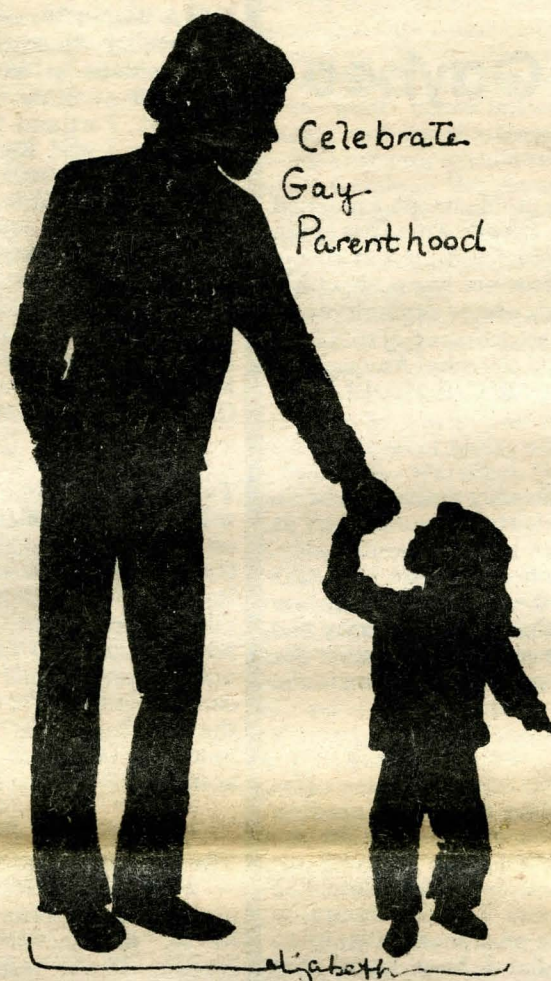
One of the difficult aspects of being the other lesbian parent is the invisibility. This is something I run into at work. There are women who talk about their kids and what they are doing — who started to crawl or ride a bike — and I participate by saying, "Oh, I have a friend whose kid is just starting to walk or talk," but I don't add much more than that to the conversation. What I would like to say is, "You should see David when I come home from work. His whole face lights up and he laughs and giggles and just makes all the bad things go away for me that happened that day." But this is something I feel I will never be able to share with them.

Integrating my being "the other parent" and dealing with my own family is hard, as I'm not out to them. I am only out to part of my family. So when Christmas comes, how do I find an excuse as to why I'm not "coming home"

for Christmas? One year my car was too old and I couldn't make the trip. I manage to find some type of excuse. What I wish I could say is, "I want to be here to see David open his presents and I don't want him and his mother spending Christmas alone." Yes, I could come out but I question if it would be any better. Each of us has a different set of problems.

There are many instances where people assume I'm a single, straight woman who doesn't have any idea what it's like to deal with "having a family." But I do and I cope with many of the same problems straight parents do. Money becomes an issue — there just never seems to be enough. I cover the bills, but before the baby there was always money for dinner and a movie without any pre-planning. Now I have to plan not just the money but a babysitter. I found I lost some of my mobility with a child. What once was a simple "jump in the shower, dress and leave" becomes a 1½ hour packing challenge. I try to set an internal clock which tells me I have to be someplace one half-hour earlier than I should, so that I arrive on time.

There are many facets to parenting which make it a challenging and exciting experience. To watch "my child" grow and become a person is worth all the pain and frustrations society places on me.



Masquerade Ball Slated

The Sportsman's Athletic Club, Lewiston, is now making final preparations for the First Annual Gay Pride Grande Masquerade Ball, to be held in Lewiston's Multi-Purpose Center on Saturday, May 12, 1984. According to Roland and Walter, owners of Sportsman's, the idea for a Gay Pride Ball came from a longstanding dream to bring the gay men and lesbians of Maine — from Kittery to the Canadian border — together for a single night of fun, inspiration and unity. Now, after many months of planning, that dream is about to become reality.

Plans for the May 12th Grande Ball are indeed grand. The Lewiston Multi-Purpose Center has been rented for the night, making it possible for more than 500 to attend. There will be disco dancing, a full liquor bar, a contest, and presentation of the first Maine Gay Pride Awards. The contest will feature \$600 in cash prizes, given in three categories — best costume, most original costume, and most outrageous costume. The awards — something of a first for Maine — will give recognition to some men and women and organizations in Maine who are fighting for civil rights within the gay community. Committees from the Lewiston area have been working since last October to bring it all together and to make the Ball an event all gay Mainers can be proud of.

Roland and Walter promise an exciting evening, and they want very much to have the support of the whole gay community to make the Grande Ball something really special. Tickets to the Ball are \$3 and must be purchased in advance. They are available at any of the gay bars in Lewiston, Portland, Augusta and Hallowell.

AIDS Survey

by Ken Mellenthin

Although AIDS continues to be more of a problem in states other than Maine, gay men here are using more caution when having sex than before AIDS gained national attention.

According to an informal survey conducted by the Gay Health Action Committee and *Our Paper* last fall of 96 gay men in Maine, 54 percent of those men said they have adapted their sexual behavior and/or their attitudes toward sexual contact as a result of the AIDS outbreak.

Of this percentage, most men said they are more selective in choosing sexual partners, and have reduced their number of sexual contacts in general. Several men said they had altered their sexual practices as a result of learning about Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

While all the men interviewed knew of AIDS, nearly one-third did not know what the acronym stands for. Slightly more than 25 percent said they had not given further thought to their sexual habits or physical health since hearing

about AIDS.

Of the 72.8 percent who admitted to thinking seriously about their health because of AIDS, the responses ranged from "I watch for symptoms," to "I fight off infection and maintain top physical health," to "I fear dying from AIDS."

Fully 83 percent knew that AIDS is believed to be transmitted through the exchange of bodily fluids. Asked whether they felt the Center for Disease Control should notify past sexual contacts of persons diagnosed with AIDS, almost 90 percent of those inter-

viewed believed the contacts should be made. Respondents said they feel more people could be protected from the syndrome in this way, and that more homosexuals could be made aware of the signs and symptoms of AIDS. Currently, the CDC makes no such contacts.

The survey was conducted over 10 days, and interviewed 84 men in bars and 12 men through the Gay Peoples Alliance of Southern Maine.

Letters

Dear Editor,

I appreciated and enjoyed Fred Berger's article and commentary about the Democratic caucuses and the candidate's positions on gay rights.

Here is my own follow-up from a small rural town in Oxford County. I attended our 7 p.m. caucus at the local town hall where 15 other Democrats turned out for the vote as well. Our show-of-hands poll gave 7 votes to Hart, 7 to Mondale and 2 to McGovern. As we are allocated 2 delegates to the convention, that meant we would send one Hart and one Mondale delegate. I had no trouble being nominated and elected the Hart delegate as I've long made it known I'm an enthusiastic supporter of the convention process. (My lover was elected my alternate.)

Based on my own experience I'm sure other gays could readily become delegates from the smaller Maine communities. I attended the last convention (in 1980) as a Brown delegate and will never forget my glee at watching a mass exodus from the convention floor during the platform debate when rank and file members left to meet Muskie at a hospitality suite. That left a majority of the more progressive delegates on the floor who proceeded to vote in an extremely liberal Maine Democratic Party platform endorsing gay rights among other planks. It was the most liberal platform the state had ever seen.

If other readers are delegates to the state convention in Lewiston in May, I wonder if *Our Paper* could help put us in touch with one another.

Thanks for an outstanding paper that helps cut into our isolation.

Sincerely,
AK.

*

A Day-Long Legislative Update on issues at the federal level of particular interest to women will be held on Saturday, April 7, from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at South Parish Congregational Church, 9 Church St., Augusta. Workshops will be held in the morning followed by a meeting with Senator George Mitchell. The meeting is sponsored by the Maine Commission For Women, Maine NOW, the Maine Women's Lobby and other groups. To register call 622-7524 or write Family Planning Association of Maine, P.O. Box 587, Augusta, ME 04330.

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personals

TO ANSWER PERSONALS:

Replies to *Our Paper* personals should be sent to *Our Paper*, P.O. Box 1732, South Lewiston Station, Lewiston, ME 04240 and must indicate on the envelope what number ad you are answering. (Responses not doing so will be returned.) If an ad contains a box number, please respond directly to "Box-holder" at that address.

★ ★

Lesbian couple interested in adopting a foreign baby. It's a difficult process. Do any of our sisters or brothers have any information about any liberal adoption agencies? #2

MAINE OUTDOORS! BiM 40's str app quiet seeks sim companion for weekend hiking / camping / canoeing / laughing, sunrises and sunsets and in between. P.O. Box 6618, Portland, ME 04101.

Lewiston-Auburn area BiWM, 28, looking for same for fun and good times. I have a porno mag collection and hot films. I'm also into hot photo sessions. All replies answered. Send photo and phone. #1

ADVERTISING MANAGER

WANTED

Our Paper is currently recruiting for an anticipated June vacancy in our Advertising Department.

If interested, please submit a cover letter and/or resume to:

OUR PAPER
P.O. Box 10744
Portland, ME 04104

This position pays on a commission basis with expense reimbursement.

Dear Gaybee

Dear Gaybee:

I am having a problem with a married couple that I am friends with. One of the partners has recently come out to me and the other does not know about his sexuality. I want to be as supportive as I can of him, but sometimes feel that I am being deceitful to his wife. Any suggestions? SIGNED, IN THE MIDDLE

Dear In:

Yours is not an easy position to be in. But, my advice is that you offer him as much support as you can comfortably. Know where your limits are with this and don't pass them. You can refer him to resources within the community and let him do as much as possible for himself. Try to stay out of getting in the middle. Keep it clean.

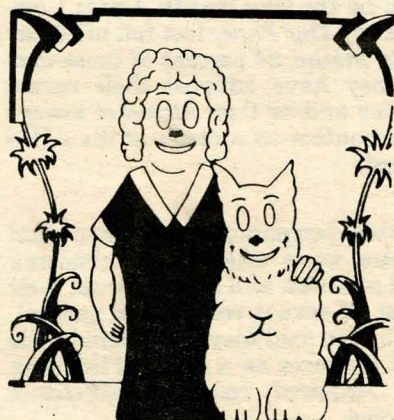
Dear Gaybee:

I wrote you last fall about needing some alternatives to the park for the winter. Thanks for your suggestions, they helped. Warmer weather should be coming soon, and I look forward to returning to the park more often to do some cruisin', but I have heard that there may have been some problems there with fag bashing, etc. What's the scoop, Gaybee? SIGNED, WONDERING

Dear Wondering:

I am not aware of any specific instances, but there's always that possibility. It's best to use some common sense and some caution. And with all that's happening with AIDS presently, you may want to use some caution in that respect as well. The potential's there to catch more than that deering smile, if you know what I mean. Good luck. Have fun. And be careful.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



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Distribution Coordinator Wanted
Our Paper is seeking a volunteer coordinator to mail subscriptions and to distribute papers to stores, bars, etc. Must be available the last Friday afternoon and evening of the month.


★ CLASSIFIEDS ★

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SEEKING



The rate for classifieds is \$4 for 30 words, 10¢ for each additional word. For personals add \$2 for handling. All ads must be prepaid. Mail ads to *Our Paper*, P.O. Box 10744, Portland, ME 04104. We ask that you not use sexually explicit language in your personals. Responses to personals will not be opened by *Our Paper* and will be forwarded to you twice monthly.

Contact/Fantasy/Wrestling Club expanding Northeast/Nationwide. 500 members — many in Maine/Mass. area. Photo listings, all scenes. Uncensored infopixpax \$3.00: NYWC, 59 West 10th St., NY, NY 10111. Inquire now!



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PURPOSE

OUR PAPER is published monthly by the *OUR PAPER* Collective, P.O. Box 10744, Portland, Maine 04104. The purpose of *OUR PAPER* is to serve as a voice for lesbians and gay men in Maine. We wish the newspaper to be a source of information, support and affirmation, and a vehicle for celebration, by and for members of the lesbian and gay men's communities. We want the paper to reflect our diversity, as well.

EDITORIAL POLICY

We will consider for publication any material that broadens our understanding of our lifestyles and of each other. Views and opinions appearing in the paper are those of the authors only.

All material submitted must be signed and include an address and/or phone number, so we can contact the author should we need to consider editorial revisions. However, within the pages of the newspaper, articles can appear anonymously, upon request, and strict confidentiality will be observed. No revisions or rejections of material will occur without dialogue with the author.

We welcome and encourage all our readers to submit material for publication and share your comments, criticisms and positive feelings with us. Remember, *OUR PAPER* is Your Paper!!! DEADLINE for each issue is the 10th of the month.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions are \$10 for 12 issues. Make checks payable to "OUR PAPER." All submissions and correspondence should be sent to *OUR PAPER*, P.O. BOX 10744, Portland, Maine 04104.

OUR PAPER COLLECTIVE

| | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
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| Myles Rightmire | J.B. |
| Elizabeth | Susan |
| Tom Sumner | |
| West Coast | |
| Correspondents: | K. Max Mellenthin |
| | John Frank |

I come from a primary state. What the heck is a caucus? More importantly, how can we make the process work for us? When Ginny Apuzzo was here, I was one of the people who said I'd be out there on caucus day (you know how excitement of the moment leads you to make a commitment?) and I sure wasn't going to go in blind. Informed action was necessary. I called a friend of mine whose wife is a prominent Democrat and asked him who could give me the inside scoop on the process. He told me to call his brother-in-law and I did.

As it turned out, this guy is a precinct captain in town and gave me a good background on the process and a bit of good advice on how to get a gay delegate from my precinct to the state convention. By the end of the conversation, I was ready to take the party by storm. The only problem was that I didn't know what precinct I live in, let alone who else lived in it who would come out and support the effort. (Even my roommate was registered at a different address.) This was all on Saturday night — advance planning is always best.

The next step was to attend the pre-caucus brunch at Fred's to plan strategy and to see who else was there from my (still undefined) precinct. We talked there about the strategy and about the candidates and realized that we'd all really have to wait until we got to our individual caucuses in order to size up the situation. (Again, advance planning is always best.)

I was not too terribly concerned with a specific candidate since Hart and Mondale are both lukewarm on gay rights. The planned strategy was to go uncommitted on the first ballot in order to see where we stood in relation to the other folk there and to see which camp needed our support in order (I hoped) to get another delegate. The gay block could then offer our votes in exchange for the promise to send a gay delegate to the convention. The caucuses are designed to allow such dealings and consolidations of votes/power. Again, the issue here is decidedly not the support of a specific candidate but 1) to get gay delegates elected and 2) to be a visible, powerful part of the political process. If we were to support one candidate or another, we would simply melt into the background of the other voters. We've

never been too good at that in the past (thank goodness) so why start now?

On to the caucus itself — after a rally in the gym at Deering High School which truly seemed designed as a Mondale rally. (We all know where the party leadership stands.) When we got to our assigned classroom, there were 104 people there from my precinct. My vision (fantasy?) of a gay landslide went out the window. After registering into the party and my roommate switching his registration into our precinct and some other local stuff (i.e. voting for a city chairman, etc.) we got on to the reason we were all there — to see who got how many of our allotted ten delegates. Since there were so many caucusers in the room we decided to dispense with the traditional act of each candidate's supporters moving to one part of the room with the uncommitted folks left in the middle. This, by the way, facilitates jockeying and dealing between groups. I am not sure if this ended up working in our favor or not. It did disguise our numbers, which is somehow appropriate.

The first ballot was about even between Mondale and Hart with others getting less than the 20% of the vote required to get even one delegate. The process was a bit confusing — we started over twice. One older gentleman voted twice — not quite realizing what was going on. We adjusted the figures to compensate for his two votes.

Now was the time to move! There were five of 'us' in the room who had identified each other before the caucus though there may have been an additional 54 people who did not step forward as 'gay voters' (10% of 104). The second ballot began with "HOLLINGS ... ZERO, GLENN ... ZERO, HART ..." I interrupted the process asking to address the Hart and Mondale folk to begin the dealing. As it turned out I should have begun earlier. This is not the first nor last time that "I should have begun earlier" will come up. It was decided by the group as a whole that discussion could take place between ballots only (yes indeed, I am a novice). When the second ballot was over, Hart had 4 delegates and Mondale 3 — with only 4 more votes needed by the Mondale camp to get another delegate. This was the chance I'd been waiting for. Again, I interrupted the group and told the

Mondale folks that there were gay votes in the room that would go their way if they would agree to send a gay delegate to the convention. The room fell silent except for the crunching of styro coffee cups and the nervous whispers of annoyed Democrats. We were obviously a new group to deal with in this process and they were surprised to find us involved (and surprised at our dealings too, no doubt). The secretary of the caucus, an older woman, snapped, "Only if he's elected!" She was clearly not pleased to be faced with this situation. The caucus chair stumbled a bit and said something like, "Well, sure. That would be good." He typified, for me, the lukewarm reactions the Democratic Party has towards gays in general. The general voters in the room had nothing to say. As a group they were unwilling to make a commitment. (Those common folk — not knowing how to 'caucus' as we 'experts' did.) The caucus chair then suggested that the Jackson voters and the uncommitted voters go in together so that we could send at least one uncommitted delegate from the precinct to the convention. Ah! Another chance! After signs across the room to each other, our group went uncommitted and, sure enough, with the combination of us and the Jackson people and the other uncommitted people in the room, we had the votes to send two delegates to the convention. Now the challenge was to get the other uncommitted caucusers to vote for gay delegates.

As a group, the uncommitted delegation had to elect two delegates and two alternates — one female and one male of each. Those who wanted to be delegates put their names in the ring and said a bit about what issues were important to them, etc. We voted for the women first — the top vote-getter is the delegate and number two is the alternate. The elected alternate was a lesbian — YEAH! We moved on to vote for the men and (after interrupting the discussions again with how one of the guys was gay and how we needed the representation at the convention) the gay man was selected — twice YEAH!

Ginny was right. If we get in there and play the game, we can win. Next time we need to do this (though I hope in not such a naive fashion) in more than a handful of precincts and with more strength in every precinct. We know we are everywhere. Now we need to be seen and heard everywhere.

(Thanks to the Norbergs, Terry, Phil, Fred and all the others who helped in the effort and with this article. EK)

GPA Update

By Phil Gautreau

"...It's not what you say, it's what you do..."

"Politics of Dancing," Reflex

We're in the thick of the Presidential campaign and all I can think about is how funny this all seems. What a farce. I'm tempted to draw caricatures of the candidates, each with captions above his head, but with nothing but failing rhetoric filling the caption. Rather than addressing the concerns of their constituency, they attack each other with accusations of incompetency and unrealistic policy planning. It's no wonder voter apathy prevails in this country. Alienation of gay and lesbian voters from the people and processes that effect our lives only serves to make us feel that our involvement and votes don't count.

Hopeless situation? Wrong. This is where and when we can change things in our favor. We can make a difference but only if we choose to get involved. We can voice our concerns as gays and lesbians, we can choose the candidate we want to support and, in November, we can vote for that same person. Easy as that. Keep it in mind.

As elected delegates to the Maine Democratic Convention, the two dozen or so of us plan to (openly) represent the ideas that are important to the gay and lesbian community. The candidates we choose will best represent our concerns. A meeting for the delegates and alternates will be held on Wednesday, April 18 at 7:30 at Our Books, 4 Pine St., Portland. This will be an opportunity to learn more about the convention procedures and to attempt to coordinate our political actions at the convention.

To supplement this, the GPA is sponsoring an open discussion entitled "84 and Counting" on Friday, March 30 which will give lesbian and gay Maine residents a chance to find out what we can do to be heard and to make a difference. Also, the Underground, Cycles, and the Spring St. Gym will hold the first of a series of gay/lesbian voter registration drives co-sponsored by the Harbormasters and GPA on March 30 and 31. This local registration drive is being held in conjunction with a larger effort by the National Gay Task Force to consolidate the lesbian/gay vote in this election year.

The Lesbian Discussion/Support Group is off to a good start. Meeting for the first time in early March, the strong attendance assured group leaders that this group will thrive.

Many thanks to those who made March a particularly pleasing month. In particular, thanks to Fred Berger and Evan Kavanaugh for spurring interest in several people to attend the Democratic caucuses. Thanks also to Mark and John for presenting articles on "developing a positive gay identity," and to Joel for sharing yet another side of the legal/civil rights issues with GPA members at the Friday Discussion Meeting. Of course, thanks to everyone in Orono who made the 11th annual Maine Lesbian/Gay Symposium a success.

On April 20 GPA will continue the "Feminism and Gay Men" discussion with a follow-up: "Gay Men Exploring Their Sexist Issues." On April 6, Seacoast Gay Men of Portsmouth, N.H. and GPA will host the viewing of the film, "Closets Are Health Hazards." Donations to help defray costs for this presentation are welcome. Nominations and elections of GPA staff will also be held for this coming academic year.

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Male Sexuality Workshop

On May 5th the Family Planning Association of Maine will sponsor a one-day conference at Bowdoin College for men and women to explore male sexual expression. With the help of a nationally recognized author on the subject of male sexuality and morning and afternoon small group discussions, led by trained facilitators, the conference will address some elements of the common myth that "female sexuality is complex, mysterious and full of problems, while male sexuality is simple, straightforward and problem free."

In 1978, Bernie Zilbergeld, Ph.D., a professor and psychologist in private practice in California, published *Male Sexuality: A Guide To Sexual Fulfillment*, a landmark work in a previously unexplored subject area. Contrary to the myth, Dr. Zilbergeld believes that "...men are neither so simple nor content as we have been led to believe..." at this point we know much less about male sexuality than about female sexuality.

Bernie Zilbergeld will be the keynote speaker at the conference and will assist with development of topics for small group discussions as well as facilitation. The primary purpose of the conference will be to increase awareness of issues encompassing male sexuality.

Write or call Ann Hussey at the Family Planning Association of Maine, 12 Pike Street, P.O. Box 587, Augusta, ME 04330, 622-7524 for information and registration material.

Lesbians' Dream Finds Life

By E.S.

I'm not a lesbian mother — yet. I will be in May. I was artificially inseminated last August, the start of an adventure in lesbian parenting for me and my lover. I'm writing this article to share my experiences — the concrete, the emotional and the interpersonal — with the thought that other lesbians reading this may be given the information, permission, or encouragement they need to go ahead with something that they, too, have wanted to do but either didn't think possible or were too scared to move forward.

After years of increasing contemplation, reading and discussion, I began to get more serious about the 'baby-thing' as my thirty-fifth birthday approached. I saw the options as either adoption — with lots of scrutiny, lies, waits, and unknowns — or artificial insemination. Because I wanted to enjoy the experience of birthing my own child I kept leaning more and more heavily toward the option of artificial insemination. But that, too, had its problems. I wondered about the gene pool, the possibility that a lesbian would not be provided access to sperm — let alone the big question of where would I ever be able to do this in Maine? I had read about legal problems, and the statistic that 75% of artificially inseminated babies were boys. As a lesbian, did I want those odds?

Where to begin? No one seemed to know, and I could find no answers in printed material. At a loss, I decided to start with my (male) gynecologist. I was honest with him, telling him that I was a lesbian and that I wanted to have a child by artificial insemination. After a short discussion about the medical/legal issues involved, and with no hassle, he referred me to a physician in Portland. On my way out his nurse made an appointment, and two weeks later, my lover and I were in the waiting room in Portland — scared, excited, and unbelieving.

Much to our surprise, and delight, we were accepted by this fertility specialist as individuals and as a lesbian couple. We had all our medical and legal questions answered, plus the crucial questions about the process itself. We learned that the sperm was fresh, from fertile donors who were screened for genetic and other diseases, with dominant-type genes (like brown hair and medium build) and above average intelligence. We also were reassured to learn that by inseminating the day before ovulation (as was their practice) the odds were even for a girl or boy. To top things off, each insemination would cost only \$50.

After a couple of tests to check my fertility, and a few months of more careful basal temperature graphs, I was inseminated. My lover was able to experience the 'conception' with me, as we fantasized about what the baby would be like and talked about how different our lives would become. Although I was sure I was pregnant after the first insemination (I craved milk and, therefore, thought I must be pregnant), it actually took two tries before I conceived. Because the doctor had told me that it usually takes about four tries before conception occurs, I was prepared for a wait.

Then came the trauma — and excitement — of telling people. While telling friends was fun and rewarding, telling my parents was very difficult. Although I'm out to them, they have never really accepted my being a lesbian. I found out, when I told my mother that I was pregnant, that she had hoped that I would decide to have a child — but choose to end my lesbian lifestyle and get married to do so. She said all the things I was afraid she would say as she expressed her hurt, anger and frustration at her powerlessness. But after she talked to my brother and my father, she slowly started to accept this baby as her future grandchild. Over the months of my pregnancy, they have gotten more and more involved in the process. My lover's parents, on the other hand, immediately

embraced the little-one-to-be as their grandchild — a welcome relief next to my struggle with my own parents.

Dealing with the community-at-large and work contacts continues to be a combination of struggles, reliefs and unknowns. While it appears that some people are happy for me (us), and others don't even know about my relationship status as a lesbian (an on-going uncomfortable situation), still others have expressed the homophobic concern about a lesbian couple raising a child. Those judgmental responses are inevitable, but difficult for us to hear nonetheless. And there are so many acquaintances in the community that we haven't heard from, and those that we will probably never relate to. We wonder what their thoughts and feelings are about my pregnancy.

A couple of months ago we learned that the baby was a boy (from amniocentesis). After a couple of hours of grief over the loss of that little girl that we both had fantasized about raising, we quickly moved into delight about our growing little boy. We realized that we both would have wanted to raise that girl in each of our own images (which are very different), and that we could have become competitive about bonding with her. With a boy, we both felt challenged: challenged to understand him, to raise him as a non-sexist male in our society, and to let him be himself — not an image of either of us. But we were — and are — scared about providing him with enough male role models. One of the important things that we learned when we discovered the sex of our child was that we have so little control over this little person: starting with the sex, and moving on to his date of birth, his temperament, personality and so on. We need to let things be, and to trust. We are trusting that we will do what we can to provide male role models for him, and that he will be okay.

Inadequate role models is not the only thing that frightens us. Acceptance of a male child into a lesbian community remains a concern, although a minimal one; acceptance of a child of a lesbian couple into the heterosexual community remains a larger one. We know it will not be easy, for him or for us. I'm sure, however, that we have no idea, at this time, of the nature of those difficulties. Also, I'm hopeful that we will be confronted with some surprises of acceptance, just as we were in the doctors' offices.

As we prepare for the coming event, we are in the process of trying to make our son as legally "ours" as we can. An attorney is looking into options with us. Although we would love to have an adoption procedure, making us both legal parents, the attorney doubts whether a child can legally have two mothers. I don't think we are prepared to take the question to the Supreme Court in order to set a precedent. At least we will put together a package of legalities to give us the best possible legal sanction of our joint parenthood.

We're learning to take one hurdle at a time. Next week my lover and I start childbirth classes. We expect some awkwardness there, but I'm also optimistic that the bond of expectant parenthood will join us all together, lesbian and straight alike.

Even with all the fears, the hurdles and the unknowns, I've not regretted taking the risk of getting pregnant. I wanted to raise a child, to share the joy and challenge of a growing being with my lover; and I didn't want not being heterosexual to stand in my way of fulfilling my wants and dreams. I discovered that I could have what I want and in not too many weeks the fantasy will become a reality. My lover and I will birth a baby.

Note: The author did not wish to print her name here, but can be contacted through Our Paper, P.O. Box 10744, Portland, ME 04104.

Choosing Honesty: A Lesbian Mother's Story

By R.

Many years have passed since I made the decision to be honest with myself and my daughters about my being a lesbian. Yet I still very vividly remember the agonizing, sleepless nights I spent searching for the answers to overwhelming questions. Should I tell them, should I have secret affairs outside the home, should I still pretend to be straight for their sakes, or should I just give them to their father and explain when they were older?

There was only one answer that felt right then, and still does today, even with all the struggles involved; to be who I am and to bring them up with love, open-mindedness and choices for their own sexuality.

When they were small, there was always the fear of having them taken away from me if anyone found out that their mother was gay. I was always, therefore, discreet in my life outside our home. I was usually in a relationship, so another woman lived with me in our house. As long as someone loved and cared for them, the girls seemed to be fine.

That is how they have grown up. But perhaps the most difficult part of their growing has been the lack of other children to talk with who also have homosexual parents.

For many years, I lived in a very different world from my children. They saw the hard, cruel and cold side of life that a lesbian or gay man lives when she is an active alcoholic and frequents the bars. The girls saw me come home from the places I chose to go with scratches, cuts and torn clothes. The bars were the only outlets for a lesbian in Portland in the 1970s, as far as I knew.

By 1980, both my children and I had had enough. My girls were confused as to what life was all about, and so was I. They had an extremely negative image of lesbianism, but this was primarily because I had dealt with life through the bottom of a beer bottle.

I stopped drinking, and literally began a new life for all of us. As a result, they have come to know me and I them for who we are as individuals. They know now that being a lesbian doesn't have to mean hardness. I participate in their school activities, sometimes with my lover and sometimes alone, and the appreciation from them is tremendous. They are average young women in school. They enjoy athletics and have friends who come and spend time at our house. Because of peer pressure on their parts, my lover and I are careful not to show or say affectionate things when their friends are around. We live quite a closeted life outside our home for fear of jobs, housing and other things, but the girls have accepted our openness in the home and are loving — not only to me but to my lover as well. There is genuine communication.

The girls' father, who has since remarried and has other children, takes them for weekends to his home and has established a good relationship with them. I think this is important to their growth.

I don't feel that my being a lesbian has hindered their development as well-adjusted children. Perhaps if anything, they are stronger and more insightful than their friends. My children know there is more than one way to live. As a result, they will always have a choice of being heterosexual or homosexual. It doesn't matter who they love, but *that* they love.

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Loving a Lesbian Mother By S

It is 5:30 p.m., and upon opening the front door, my lover and I are greeted with smiles, hugs, kisses and exclamations. We are home for the evening, and my lover's two daughters, aged 12 and 15, compete for our attention to share the day's events with us.

It wasn't always that way.

Two years ago, having known their mother just a few short weeks, I met two quiet little girls who regarded me with big eyes and unmasked suspicion. Who was I, their eyes seemed to say, to begin a relationship with their mother. Was I good enough? Was I kind and giving, and would I treat them well? And perhaps most importantly, would I take their mother away from them?

Because Ruth and I did not live together right away, there was time for me to get to know these two young ladies. The months that elapsed before my lover's and my relationship was cemented by living together proved vital to my future family. The girls had their doubts about me — and I about them.

Never having been around children much, I was apprehensive about getting to know them. But they *were* cute. And polite. And giggly. As I saw more of them, they took quite a liking to me. I didn't know what I felt.

Ruth told both girls years ago that she was a lesbian. They were small at the time, but had never since shown any resentment of the fact that their mother loved other women instead of men. It was simply a fact of their lives. They had lived with their mother and other women, most of whom had had children of their own. Now, here I was with no children, and no desire for any!

So, we lived together. And we coped — or I tried to. I resented the lack of privacy, the extra demands on my time, my emotions and my wallet. They, in turn, resented my increasing authority over the lives and the affection I received from Ruth. The war was for the most part a quiet one, however. The things we fought over were usually surface issues. I was obsessed about school grades that could have been higher, television time and nightly showers. They asked me why they couldn't come to dinner with us, and why we did things that didn't

include them. My guilt feelings flourished.

I went for counseling. The counselor made suggestions: more self-imposed privacy at home, more respect for the girls as people. Above all, more patience on my part, and thinking before sticking my foot in my mouth. And so, I tried. What I learned was that it could all work if I was only willing to allow it. I also learned, to my astonishment, that I loved both young women dearly by this time, and was very proud of them.

I realized that I had a choice — to either withdraw completely from the parenting tasks at hand, or plunge into them and commit myself to being a "co-parent." I plunged in.

Now, a year later, my life is a changed one. Not only do I have a wonderful woman for a life partner, but I also share in the pride and joy of raising two lovely, teenage girls.

Perhaps the most difficult lesson for me to swallow has been the fact that children are not adults. Their rooms look like tornadoes have swept through, they hate to do chores and they try to deceive us, just to make sure we're paying attention to them.

But surprisingly, I've accepted as a matter of course that kids are kids. In front of the girls' friends, Ruth and I act as nothing more than friends who share expenses by living together. Our bedroom door shuts quickly to hide the double bed and dual dressers whenever a playmate drops in unexpectedly. If we know someone is coming, there is time to clean up, by putting away the gay/lesbian publications that lie freely around the house.

Perhaps my problems as a lesbian co-parent are just beginning. Maybe the rebellion that flashes in the eyes of adolescents has yet to make itself felt to Ruth and me. But for now, the girls and I have love and respect for each other and our separate lifestyles.

The girls have the advantages of living in an environment where love, sex, feelings and sexuality are discussed and dealt with openly. If they choose heterosexuality — or homosexuality — they will be accepted. It's not a choice many teenagers have today, and I am proud of the role I can play in their lives.

On Being a Lesbian Mother of a Male Child

By D.W.

At times I've felt that the two most important parts of my life were threatening to tear me asunder. To deal with these sometimes opposing forces I've had to get more and more honest with myself. How do I really feel? What does my gut tell me is right for me? Despite the reactions of others and results it may have for me. Isn't that how I got here in the first place?

Sorrowfully and with difficulty I have made choices, while understanding and feeling for the voices behind the issues, our issues. My yearning for the solace of peace and safety with my sisters has been pitted against the rockhard knowledge that there had to be another way — a way of love encompassing us all and rejecting hatred as an answer ever again.

As a lesbian mother I have cried with other lesbian mothers who've had their children literally dragged from their arms by police because a patriarchal legal system judged their lesbianism unfit. As a lesbian mother of a male child I have cried with other lesbian mothers of male children who have been barred from their only refuge — their lesbian community — because their children are male.

Women who struggled through all the barriers against coming out in our society, who fought the approbation of their families and friends, who risked the loss of their mothering rights, and who finally reached the community of their sisters, only to have the door slammed in their faces because their children are male... I cannot express in words the anguish I heard in their voices but I clearly remember their sorrow.

Fortunately I came out in a city containing a large and diverse lesbian community and the lesbians I knew accepted me and my child with no reservations. This warm supportive environment of women loving women created a trust in

and love for our community like nothing else I've ever experienced in my life. When other lesbian mothers related their opposite experiences especially in small isolated areas where support is particularly needed, my immediate reaction was disbelief and shock, then anger and sadness.

After moving to Maine I encountered this for the first time. I was welcome alone or not at all. My reaction was to withdraw for the most part. Most single mothers including lesbian mothers do not have the financial resources to provide much if any of their own child-care — if the children can't go neither do they. Personally I have been fortunate enough to afford childcare sometimes and have participated somewhat but certainly not to the extent I would have preferred. The isolating effects were subtle and like most women I turned inward after my initial disappointments.

After several years I have now found lesbians, some mothers themselves, who accept us both with love and support. They are very special to me, and have made the difference in my being able to stay in Maine. Two years ago Audre Lorde wrote an article after she was asked to speak and read her poetry at a midwest lesbian conference and told that she couldn't bring her son. She refused to attend. Her view was that as a black woman and lesbian she would not contribute to any more divisiveness or enmity between people. Her words were comforting and released tears of hurt I didn't know were there. Since then her words have sustained me through isolated times when I was tempted to question my choices, and have validated my hopes and concerns for the future.

We all have to live with the truth in ourselves and not popular opinion, but isolation and despair have no place between us in the lesbian community.

Loving Another Man's Children

A man who enters into a relationship with a gay father also enters into some kind of relationship with the children. For most men this would be a difficult, even frightening, situation. In our particular culture men are not raised the way that women are with the idea that they will take direct care of their children. Witness the obvious judicial bias towards awarding child custody to the mother. There are few role-models for the single father, even the weekend father, and there are fewer, if any, for the man who loves and lives with that father. Such a man must teach himself to deal with children by trial and error.

One man who has recently become a gay stepfather agreed to talk about his experiences with *Our Paper*. Call him Ralph. He is thirty-one and works for himself. He has led a settled life and was accustomed to doing as he pleased. He was basically satisfied with his existence. Now he is involved with a man of about his own age who has four children ranging in age from ten months to five and a half years. The children are with them on visits for up to two weeks at a time.

Ralph never wanted children of his own, but did want to be involved in a family with children. Now he is more involved than he ever expected. His business is seasonal and he currently has more available time than their father to care for the children. When they come he has them for the day while their father works. He began their first visit by going alone to pick them up from their mother.

Naturally these visits severely limit his freedom and mobility. He prepares their meals, keeps watch while they play or nap, checks to be sure they are brushing their teeth and washing behind their ears, and he has even helped to toilet-train the three and one-half year old. While the children are there, he essentially can do nothing on his own.

In theory, being tied down like this should be awful, but in practice Ralph

finds it "more fun than you can possibly imagine!" He enjoys watching the children grow and feeling that he is a part of their development. Something as simple as shaving will suddenly gain an interested audience and require answers to the questions of why and how. His success with the toilet-training in particular has given him the feeling of having made a basic and lasting difference in the child's life.

Ralph was unprepared for the children's mental and emotional capacities for love. His prior feelings of love were more physically based. The love he receives from the children is very different and he realizes with some shock that he has fallen in love with them in the same way. It is an experience he wouldn't have wanted to miss.

In his concern over what he is passing on to the children, Ralph examines his own morals and values. They are conservative views: honesty, trust, self-esteem, how to think, and how to care for one's physical and mental health. Being gay is not a problem; it is a fact of life. Ralph feels it is important to answer the children's questions honestly, as they come up. He doesn't feel it is necessary to come out to them. They will figure it out for themselves when they need to.

Even with the children's mother the gay issue is not a problem per se. They disagree over the methods of raising children. They are on civil terms, and they cordially dislike each other. The situation is probably not too different from what it would be if Ralph were a stepmother rather than a gay stepfather.

A life which includes children needs to be very stable. The children need a secure retreat from their daily juggling with life. They can sense when the adults around them are disturbed and it throws them off balance. So Ralph and his lover work at developing secure careers and a non-hecktic social life, and in the process their relationship becomes more stable. Ralph feels that his life is more complete with the children and their father than it would have been with the father alone.

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OUR PEOPLE

Gay Father: Evolving Roles and Resolutions

Whether by circumstance or by conscious choice, many within our community are parents. Their struggles and joys are both similar and diverse. This interview with Frank B., a Portland gay father, explores his feelings and experiences as a parent. Further, it discusses his work in coordinating a support group for gay and lesbian parents.

BJ: Why don't we start by your telling me a bit about your coming out process as a gay parent.

FRANK B.: I came out as a gay father much later than coming out as a gay man in the sense that I was dealing with my sexuality issues before I realized the implications of my parenting status.

I was trying to fulfill expectations that I felt society had for me. You know, to go ahead, get married, have a family and the whole bit.

BJ: White Cape Cod with black shutters? Volvo in the driveway? 2.5 kids?

FRANK B.: Yes! I feel that I never subscribed totally to the whole nuclear

"It's like sitting on a fence with very sharp pickets, with one foot in the gay community and one foot in the straight community and your lover and your friends tugging you towards the gay community."

family trip, but I bought most of it. Towards the end of my marriage, I believe what was happening to me was that the repressed homosexual feelings were deadening me emotionally. I wasn't directly seeking homosexual contacts, but I wasn't in contact with anyone or anything. I was just withdrawing.

Even after my son was born, I had a hard time connecting with him or others because my homosexual tendencies were starting to eat away at me. It takes energy to hold those things (the tendencies) in. Consciously, I didn't know what it was. But subconsciously, it was starting to affect me greatly. My relationship with my wife started to deteriorate emotionally and physically. It just wasn't a healthy situation. When she perceived that, she decided that she would leave. That gave me the opportunity to start exploring some of these feelings that I had repressed. As soon as I was able to give this some time, they started coming to the surface. I had a sexual experience with a man a few months after she had left and that verified it for me. I finally connected with those feelings. That was a wonderful, liberating experience for me. I knew that I had found what I wanted.

My experience was that I never had connected my childhood homosexual experiences with the events that were happening until much later. I was so disconnected from myself emotionally that I had no idea that it was my repressed homosexuality that was causing the deterioration of my marriage.

BJ: Was your child born towards the end of your marriage?

FRANK B.: Yes. He was born about 18 months before we separated. Later, while I was coming out as a gay person, which was a slow process for me, I was terribly confused about what it all meant. If I was a homosexual, why was I a father. Why had I done that? I had almost committed a crime, so to speak. Here was this innocent person; this victim.

BJ: Because you are gay?

FRANK B.: Because I was gay and felt that I had no right to be a father. It

was a very confusing time for me.

BJ: Did you want to be a parent?

FRANK B.: No. Well, it seemed totally within the bounds of the marriage. But, if I had chosen, especially with the knowledge that I have now, I never would have chosen to be a parent. That doesn't mean that I'm not happy to be one now. The problem is mainly in how society sees me as a gay male and the harm that can come to my child.

People who aren't gay parents are quick to point out that "It's going to be okay by the time he's 18. Things are going to change a lot." I can subscribe to that partially. But, I also know that the bigotry and the hatred towards homosexuals is going to exist longer than that and I'm afraid that he's going to suffer as a result of that hatred and be hurt as a result of my sexual preference.

Part of wanting to protect him is just part of being a parent. All parents want to protect their children from harm and shelter them. But I have to be realistic about that, too. I think on the other hand that it will add a whole other dynamic to

his life that not all other kids have.

BJ: Well, it will certainly be acceptable for him to be gay. He won't have to sweat coming out to you!

FRANK B.: (laughs) Right! His mother is also an excellent parent. She is fantastic. She is supportive of people and their lifestyles. She had some difficulty with my gayness, which I understood and tried to be supportive of her. That makes a lot of difference in a gay parenting situation — the other parents — if they're there and what their attitudes are. I think it's an issue for her. It centers around our child's well-being and how that might affect his status in the neighborhood or in school or his emotional health.

BJ: How do you think your coming out process would have been different had you not been a parent?

FRANK B.: I used to think that I would have taken off. That I would have gone to New York or that I would have gone to San Francisco and been "the single gay male." But for me, that would have been detrimental to my own personal development at that time. Now, I look forward to traveling and exploring not just the gay community, but the world in general.

I have let go of all my stereotypes or images that I had of parenting. I think my stereotypes were very much tied to images. I was caught between the straight father image and the stereotypical gay image.

There were two extremes and there was no way for those two worlds to meet. It used to trouble me deeply. I used to feel dishonest. And I used to feel like I had to hide the fact that I was a parent from people. I was afraid of what they would think. Is this person confused? Is this person trying to live in both worlds? What is he? Who is he?

I was in a precarious position within the gay community and in society as a whole. I felt I could be rejected from either side for different reasons. I could be rejected by the gay community because I have to deal with a lot of straight society. I was connected to them — the oppressor society. A lot of gay men in particular have trouble with this. They don't understand.



I can be rejected by straight society because I am looked upon as some kind of misfit — a confused person who didn't know what he wanted.

It's like sitting on a fence with very sharp pickets, with one foot in the gay community and one foot in the straight community and your lover and your friends tugging you towards the gay community.

The integration process for me has been being able to remove the pickets and walk where I have to walk, being where I have to be without that dissonance. Being able to proudly say to my gay friends that I am a parent and not feeling that they are going to reject me because of that. I have been supported by many different people and I never could have done it alone.

Now I know more of who I am and what I want to do with my life than I did at those times. It's more like a journey of self-fulfillment in an area that used to scare me.

BJ: You mentioned the stereotypes of being a parent and the expectations and said that you had let go of them. I'm wondering what do you now see as making a good parent? How do you strive to be that?

FRANK B.: It's funny because I never do a lot of typically parental things. But it has to do with integrating my perception of what it is to be a gay male with what it is to be a father.

BJ: So part of being a good father for you is to be a gay male, openly. It is being honest and teaching honestly. Is that accurate?

FRANK B.: Yes. By my being able to say that I am a gay parent and to become integrated, I find that it is possible to become a healthy gay father. I also feel that there is no discrepancy or dissonance as there used to be between being a gay male and being a parent. They are different worlds, but I have to accept both worlds for what they are and get what I need from both areas.

BJ: You touched earlier on wanting to protect your child, as a gay parent. What kinds of things do you feel you must protect him from? What are your fears?

FRANK B.: First of all, I will say that the urge to protect is instinctual. The need to protect, however, isn't always in your child's best interest. I'd say that above and beyond what every parent would want to protect their child

from, that a gay parent has special issues. Their child can bear the brunt of ostracism and ridicule if their parent's sexual preference is found out. And I think that for me, I was so confused about my sexuality and coming out process that I thought my child would have to go through a similar process when he discovered about me and my gayness. I was afraid that he was going to go through the trauma of not being able to understand why his father is gay. But, the simplicity of the matter is that he doesn't have all of those preconceived ideas of what a parent should be. He just sees me for who I am. He is a child who is looking at a parent and isn't seeing a lifetime of experiences. He isn't prejudiced yet.

BJ: How old is your child?

FRANK B.: Seven.

BJ: Do you think he's free with information about your gayness at school or do you think he feels that he has something he must hide?

FRANK B.: Oh no, not yet, anyway. Although it's real hard. He knows the big word now with the kids is faggot and queer. I hear it all the time on my street and I get real tired of it. Anyway, one of his friends used it at the library once and he used it, too. He then looked right at me, as I happened to be right there, too. And he just kind of looked down and I said, "You know I don't like that word, so please don't use it... or at least when you're around me." The peer pressure is incredible. I'm still not sure if he knows what the word means. I don't think any of the young kids do. When I was a kid I knew that to be a homosexual was about the worst thing you could be. Nobody had to tell you, you just knew it. I had an interesting talk with a man whose son is much older than mine and he was saying, "My son is just fine and he is getting along just fine with my gayness." I was saying that for a child who is older and knows what "faggot" and "queer" means it can be that much harder. On the surface it may be just fine, but the next time he hears a fag joke, or the next time he hears someone called faggot, it's going to hit home more.

BJ: How does a child explain that his father is gay, but that he doesn't fit those stereotypes — that he is a good person?

FRANK B.: Well, see, that's the problem. That's the risk. It's almost like having to come out yourself for the child.

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It's like guilt by association. There is dissonance between loving a person and respecting that person and yet having that person up for ridicule. That's very disturbing. It's very hard for me to know that I can be a source of pain for my child. That affects my life and my lifestyle.

BJ: What do you see as the positive experiences your child will have as a result of your gayness?

FRANK B.: I think the positive side for him is that by his involvement in this parent/child relationship with me opens him up to a whole set of circumstances that he otherwise would not have. And before, I saw this as negative and

"It's very hard for me to know that I can be a source of pain for my child. That affects my life and my lifestyle."

thought, "Oh my god, I'm going to expose him to a lifestyle that he doesn't belong in, nor do I."

BJ: So you had to deal with your own feelings about being gay.

FRANK B.: Sure. For me, it's gone from total repression to coming out, to coming out emotionally. I think I came out politically before I came out emotionally. I used to go from being a gay man when he (my child) was with his mother, to being a father when he was with me. Now I can feel much more integrated. I am much more relaxed. Now I think I am ready to deal with different types of relationships in my life without fear that it's going to be debilitating to him or to myself.

I was very confused. I was very much on the fence. I was exploring my sexuality, my gayness. On the other hand, I was a parent in a very heterosexual-identified society. I suppose I could have moved into the woods and lived a lifestyle without other gay people and isolated myself. But I have chosen to live here in Portland with other people. The dissonance between my being gay and being a parent is lessening.

BJ: I'd like to shift topics now and talk about the gay parents group you are involved in. How did that get started?

FRANK B.: It was an idea whose time had come. I had been thinking for a long time about how good it would be to have such a group. So, after talking with people about the idea, we decided to do it. I think that basically people are pleased with how it's going and its being a place for people to get together and talk about parenting issues. It wasn't difficult to get the group together. It didn't take a

"... On the surface it may be fine, but the next time he hears someone called faggot, it's going to hit home more."

tremendous amount of energy. It was just a matter of getting phone numbers and getting people together.

BJ: How long has the group been meeting?

FRANK B.: Since the beginning of September.

BJ: So it's quite new.

FRANK B.: Yes, and we're going through a lot of new group pains. But luckily, I've had people who were able to give me an idea on how long it can take to get a group going and some of the processes involved. Initially, we had 10 or 12 people who got together and now it seems that a different group of those 10 or 12 get together each week. It's usually a group of five or six.

BJ: What kinds of needs do you see being met by the group?

FRANK B.: It's hard to say. It's so new and the attendance has fluctuated, as has the group composition. There are always new members, so in essence it's been two or three different groups that have been meeting.

My sense has been that it is a group that deals with long-range, underlying aspects of being a gay parent. Most of the people who attend the meetings are pretty well established in their relationships either with or without their children. I would say that it's not a crisis intervention type of group, but we would hope that gay parents would use us as a resource and know that there are others who have dealt with or continue to deal with similar problems.

BJ: What do you see as happening at

the group?

FRANK B.: What I see happening and of importance is that people can get together and talk about parenting issues as gay people.

I'm looking forward to my next stage of gay parenting where I can be more open and supportive of other gay parents on a political level. I think that one of the most wonderful aspects of this group is that I see tremendous amounts of strength from the members and what they are doing with their children.

BJ: What do you see happening politically in Maine for gay parents?

FRANK B.: I think there has to be some type of protection for gay parents

to have custody of their children if they wish and not have their sexual preference used against them in custody settlements. I think that is the most important one. And I think that a very important aspect of the human rights bill would be the legitimacy it would lend to the whole atmosphere that we parent in. It would protect all gay men and lesbians from discrimination. But the subgroups of that population, such as gay parents, would benefit also. This would take the wind out of the sails of the bigots somewhat and maybe make those fence pickets I mentioned earlier a little less sharp.

BJ: Do you see the group becoming political at any point? Lobbying for legislation to protect gay parents in divorce proceedings, etc.?

FRANK B.: Well, I think the next time the Human Rights Bill comes up it would be beneficial for gay parents to support that, but I think it will have to be an individual decision. Some of the group members aren't completely out and there are risks.

BJ: Do most of the people in the group have custody of their children?

FRANK B.: The majority have allowed the non-gay spouse to retain custody. I think this has a lot to do with the State laws.

In my case, when I was divorcing, joint custody was pretty uncommon. Now they do it all the time. But I, out of guilt, thinking, "How can I be a good parent?" let my spouse have custody. I am very much involved in the parenting process, though.

BJ: How have people in the group had their children respond to their coming out?

FRANK B.: Predominately, since the children of the parents in this group are young, there is no visible reaction to the homosexuality issue. The kids are so young that they are not perceiving that their father or mother is gay. The second most common reaction is acceptance. Since the parents are so together about their sexuality, the kids accept it. As one parent in the group put it, "The children get it (acceptance) through osmosis, through living with the lifestyle."

BJ: How did you deal with it?

FRANK B.: I had an interesting experience, because I had no idea how aware my son was of my gayness. I have *Gay Community News* and *Our Paper* lying around and lots of gay people in my life. One night I had a friend over for dinner and he asked him (the friend) where he works. The friend said he worked at the Gay People's Alliance and he (my child) responded, "Oh, my dad's gay." I just kind of choked on my lasagna or whatever I was eating and I thought THIS IS SIGNIFICANT! I was kind of taken aback by this. I didn't realize that he had been able to formulate that. It's not that he's not capable of that, but I just hadn't given it much thought. There was probably some apprehension on my part. You know, wondering when the day would come. I had expected he would say, "Oh god, you're gay..." and all that stuff. All negative. And again, just like he wouldn't perceive a person as gay or lesbian, he's not going to be biased against a political thing I'm into, such

as the oppression of homosexuals.

BJ: What kinds of support do you think you get from knowing other gay parents or from this group in particular?

FRANK B.: Well, this group has been supportive because we are able to get together and share our experiences. It's the wonderful discovery that you are not alone. There is the diversity among the members that makes it very interesting. I can never tell what kind of direction it's going to take or what kind of support it will offer. For me, it's just enough that it exists.

BJ: Have you noticed any significant differences between the problems that face lesbian parents vs. those that face gay men as parents?

FRANK B.: I think the lesbian community is much more together on the parenting issue than gay men, since women have always had the socialization for parenting. It is not alien to them.

I think the gay male subculture has no place for children, so gay fathers have to plug into lots of heterosexual support systems for dealing with their children, such as schools, and have not had very much support from the gay male subculture. That's not a criticism. Many gay men are supportive of me and of my child as well.

BJ: How do you see your life as a gay parent as being different from that of a gay person without children.

"What I see happening of importance is that gay people can get together and talk about parenting issues as gay people... I have been supported by many people and I never could have done it alone."

FRANK B.: It is different. It is the most responsibility I will ever have. I am responsible for another person financially, emotionally, for their clothing, their food, their schooling and for their well-being. A relationship with another adult would not come close to this. And that's the nature of the parent/child relationship. My child's mother also has the same responsibility. We share it.

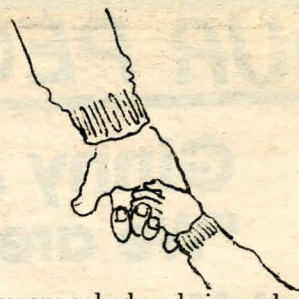
I have him from Friday to Thursday every other week. I'm fortunate to have him for such a long period of time.

BJ: What types of problems have come up following a divorce, with the straight parent badmouthing the gay parent and their lifestyle?

FRANK B.: Fortunately, I haven't heard too much of that. I supposed it is usually kept between the parents. Stuff like... "don't flaunt your gayness or you won't have the kid." Kids of course pick up on the tension and they usually know. Many children have said to their parents when they came out, "You didn't have to tell me that; I knew." But that depends on the age of the child and where the child is developmentally. I think that if the parent uses the gay issue against the other parent, there are usually other issues as well and the situation is probably pretty hostile. Of course, the children are negatively affected, too.

BJ: Are there people in the group who are not out to their children?

FRANK B.: Oh, sure. It's a very delicate matter. And I think that the overall attitude is to answer questions



when they are asked and give only what is asked for. Don't go overboard. Like with my child, when he made the comment, "Oh, my dad is gay," that means something to him, but I'm not sure just what. Like with any other question that comes up with a child, I do not give too much information. I need not overinform. Keep the explanation simple.

BJ: How do you see yourself as having changed as a result of having this group?

FRANK B.: For me, it was a real positive step in my gay identity. It was an affirmation of my gay parenthood. In the past, I never had it together enough to even consider a group like this. I get a lot of gratification every time the group meets. To be a part of a group that deals with tremendously important issues in a positive, supportive manner — it's satisfying to be a part of a group like that.

I hope that the people who read this article will come to the group for support. It's informal. It's a group of gay people who have another set of circumstances to deal with. I feel that any group with a set of circumstances adds a richness to our existence in a positive way. The tolerance of the group is high and the diversity amazing. I find it stimulating. People's ingenuity and the way they have adapted to their lives and the lives of their children are also very encouraging. I hope that the group continues to grow and be supportive.

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OUR PEOPLE

Ginny Apuzzo: "We are making history"

Part II

On February 9 the gay and lesbian community in Maine, and our friends and supporters, were blessed with the presence of Virginia Apuzzo, who delivered an inspiring, insightful, provocative address at USM — Portland.

Ginny Apuzzo, the Executive Director of the National Gay Task Force and the Fund for Human Dignity, and a long-time activist in the struggle for lesbian and gay rights, was brought to Maine by the Gay People's Alliance at USM. We applaud GPA for making the visit possible. The following are excerpts from the speech (italics), the content of a press conference held earlier in the day (FC), and a brief interview conducted by Our Paper staffers Fred Berger and DE. We regret we could not print the speech in full.

One of the things I want you to hear from me is that you are a vital part of a vital movement. You are a vital part of a vital movement. However insignificant you may think your lives are, and they are not insignificant, you are being called upon now to create and to give. Every place I go, communities say, "Can we really make a difference? Does it matter what we do here — in Birmingham? Or in Memphis? Or in Portland?" We are a vital movement because you are here in Portland, and in Memphis, and in Birmingham, and in Tulsa, and in Albany. Precisely because you are there challenging the notion that we exist as aberrant clones in New York, San Francisco, Houston, and, yes, Dade County. It is precisely your presence that lends vital credence to a most overwhelming reality that exists when we say, "We are everywhere." We are everywhere. We are everywhere. And, as the people of Portland, and as the people of Maine, come to know you, and come to be responsive to you, and come to the realization that, "By Gaud, they are everywhere, aren't they!!!" your mere presence is a monumental piece of education. And it is that you contribute. That you have organized, that you have often the presiding officer of the Senate to carry your issue...

What does the local movement offer the national movement? Its vitality, its promise, its commitment, and the education that it renders to a group of politicians who inevitably will move up the ladder, inevitably moving to larger and larger areas of influence, and who inevitably will carry the education that you have given them. That's an amazing contribution. Nobody could do that but you. Nobody.

Your presence — the influence you have, the courage that you bring to the struggle — it's a monumental contribution, for which I am incredibly grateful. I need to tell you we need you, Maine. We know we need you. You must know that we need you. You must know that it is you who are the force in this incredible, exciting, amorphous, sometimes disorganized movement. This vital movement — it is not David Goodstein. It is not The Advocate. It is not the National Gay Task Force. It is not Ginny Apuzzo. It is not any individual, any particular organization, any particular publication. It is you, and the millions of "you's" who are gathered in a multitude of cities and towns. That's the gay and lesbian movement. I thank you.

DE: What I found particularly inspiring about your talk was that there's this well-financed radical right movement in this country, but at the same time you have a strong belief in the power of people to change. I think we lose sight of that out of frustration. We lose sight of our own power and of our power to touch people's hearts. In the stories that you related tonight, what



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really hit me was that in those experiences you were touching people's hearts and you were speaking to the rational sides of them.

Apuzzo: I believe that. If we believed in our own lovability — that we are lovable people, if we believed in our own capacity to empower ourselves and each other, if we believed that one person can make a difference, then there would be no stopping us. The war of the radical right is a war that is not so much effective in terms of getting all these poor misguided folk to send in their nickels and dimes because "hell's going to get them if they don't." The effectiveness of the radical right is to convince us that they're a well-oiled, well-financed machine that certainly would render our passion impotent. That's the misconception they are under. Because their money isn't going to touch so and so who decides, "Gee, I know Fred. Fred's a decent guy." People Magazine did a poll — I'm not saying People Magazine is a great thing. People Magazine is a pedestrian nothing," except it's sold in supermarkets which means its readership is very, very "Main Street." They did a poll which said that upwards of 80% of their readers believed it was wrong to discriminate against gays and lesbians in employment. When they followed up the question and said "What makes you think that way?", invariably people said because they knew someone who is gay. Still in 1984, the most revolutionary thing gay people do is come out, to be who we are, to be us. So you come out, Fred and so does your mom and dad and your sister and your uncle and the neighbor down the street and the guy who does your printing — not the guy who does your printing. I read that story. You touch the lives of people who touch your life and some of them can ignore it — they don't want to deal with it — but some people will see, and they're not going to see gay people the same way because, "You know, Fred's a good guy. I know Fred. He wouldn't do that. That's not the way Fred is." That's still our most potent thing, which is why grassroots organizations, the visibility, becoming apparent to the community is so important. I honestly believe that standing up and saying, "I am who I am" is it. And when you consider the extraordinary courage it takes just to be who you are, I think we're incredible folk.

I keep coming back to Alabama and Memphis. People in Birmingham, Alabama have a community center. The community is in a residential section and they have a lambda this big out on their porch! Do you know how brave you gotta be to have a lambda in a residential section of Birmingham, Alabama?? How can you go and see that and not walk away and be touched deeply by people's commitment to being who they are. That's extraordinary. That is us all

over the country. That's you in Portland. If you people could stand up in front of that room tonight and look out at those faces, see them listening and speaking to themselves, because you say something and people think, "I know that. I know what she means." It touches them and it kicks off something that happens in their minds. And you watch it like a film across their face. You watch 300 people do that and you say, "This is an incredible community." I believe what I am saying to these people because they pull it out of me. I think the most incredible thing they could have done is to turn around and look at each other. Really look at each other.

FB: I want you to know what an incredible event this was for Portland. I never expected that so many people would show up.

Apuzzo: Isn't that wonderful...

FB: And then to come to the reception. It was really an experience.

Apuzzo: That's lovely. They steal your heart. I'm going to fall in love with Portland, carry Portland around in my heart.

One of the things that my encounter with Reverend Falwell showed me so very vividly was that, number one, it is a business to Jerry Falwell. It is a business. I carry in my briefcase more hate mail than most other folks I know. It is unbelievable. It is a business. These people are making a load of money peddling ignorance and fear. And one of the most exquisite experiences I ever had was in Chicago when we did "The Phil Donahue Show." In the first part of the hour, Jerry Falwell was Jerry Falwell. Now the audience — these were really Chicago folks, many of them were older folks, family people — this was not a radical crowd. This was not even a moderate crowd. And at one point, a woman in the audience stood up and she said, "Reverend Falwell, you're a bigot." And different people then stood up, none of whom were radical people, and they appealed to reason. Recognizing hate, they appealed to reason. By the time it was all over, Jerry Falwell had lost the

audience. Not because we were good, but because the people recognized hate. They recognized the lack of reason. At the end of the show, Jerry Falwell left. Dan (Bradley) and I thought we'd hang around and talk with the folks. And a pregnant woman who had asked a question came up and she said, "I really want to thank you for doing what you're doing." I was shocked and I said, "Thank you so much for saying that. Why did you say that?" And she said, "If my child is born gay, I want it to grow up in a different world." I still get goose bumps when I tell that story.

Why am I telling you this? I'm telling you this because we must have confidence in our capacity and strength to educate people. We must believe we can educate people. We must believe that people will be reasonable when approached with reason. That people will respond as good and decent folks. Those are the people that we must appeal to. Those are the people with whom we must engage in this work. And this work isn't a sprint. It's a marathon. It is a marathon, with all the shinsplints and all the pain under your ribs. But we're winning — little by little, bit by bit. Look at how close you came in Maine. Look at Ohio, New York! Rochester, New York, a little town in upstate New York. The opposition was so frenzied and so irrational, and the community was so persistent and so reasoned, they won the ordinance!

FB: What really struck me tonight was your faith, especially when you were talking about the "Phil Donahue Show" and how those people were affected. I just want to know where your faith comes from, your belief that people can change, that you can influence people.

Apuzzo: I have no capacity for, I cannot countenance, giving up. I'm somebody who is angry. I'm motivated by anger. Injustice just drives me crazy. It's irrational; it's crazy. It makes me passionate. It's a violation of everything that human beings can be. Whether you believe in evolution, God, whatever... when you look at the human

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being that has evolved with an enormous capacity to love and to care, to hate, you see we've got enormous capabilities. To piss it away hating people, and stopping and constraining and negating — it's just such an irrational abuse of humanity. I believe in the basic decency of people and that people who aren't behaving in a decent fashion have to be touched and called to decency. You must summon people to live up to their own sense of decency. If they can't find it, you have to help them find it. You have to say, "Psst, this is wrong. This is a no-no." During the black civil rights struggle, perhaps the most significant contribution John Kennedy made was when he said, "this is a moral issue." He was talking about the rightness or wrongness of discrimination. He held it up in that context and suddenly it's clear. It is immoral to have different sets of standards of what the quality of life is like for people based on an arbitrary element like color.

I believe people have greater potential than to be into negation. It doesn't allow us to be who we are. We have so much to offer. We've survived denying ourselves our own identity. Do you know what the hell kind of survival that is? That's incredible. Think of what you did as a child. I think of some of the things I did as a child, like making myself so idiosyncratic that my parents would never identify the single idiosyncrasy that I didn't want them to find. I invested in, at the age of ten, totally unpredictable behavior, so that the one element would not be discernible. First of all I think we're incredibly bright having to live as schizophrenics. You develop the capacity to see inside-outside constantly with the same eyes. You live on two levels simultaneously. That's extraordinary. Once we set ourselves free of that, we bring an extraordinary insight into what it means to hide, what it means to be on the outside. The absurdity of it. That's why I think we have such a potential.

"We must have confidence in our capacity and strength to educate people."

... Several weeks ago, I testified before the Committee on Human Development of the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Washington, in support of a resolution recommending that all levels of government adopt legal protection for the rights of gay and lesbian citizens. When the vote was taken, it was unanimous. I don't believe for a minute that we had their hearts and minds. But I believe that, because the people who spoke to our issue spoke to it in the context of civil rights, as Third World people, it created an atmosphere in which those who would not support us, dared not be unsupportive.

Little by little, bit by bit, we can achieve what ten years ago I couldn't even begin to dream about — becoming a civil rights movement in this country. I want to tell you one more story because it's a vital part of what everybody in this movement made happen. You may have read about the effort to have a gay or lesbian speaker at the August March on Washington, and all over the country gays and lesbians were asking, "Why aren't we going to be represented in Washington at the March?" I sent a telegram to Judy Goldsmith, President of the National Organization for Women. I waited a while for a response. No response. I sent a second telegram. No response. So, I called up. And, I said, "How come I haven't gotten an answer?" And the woman who answered said, "Well, Judy isn't here..." and on and on. I said, "Look, it's Tuesday. This is the weekend. Every day that goes by, the ante goes up." A woman called me that night and said Judy will call me tomorrow. Judy called on Wednesday and she said, "We have a compromise. Several of the speakers will talk about gay and lesbian rights." I said, "Wrong. Judy, suppose a group of men were having a march and several of them agreed to talk about women's issues?" Judy said, "I understand." That night, we made a conference call. The conference call began at 12:30 a.m.

and went on until 2:40 a.m. On the line were the following people: Dr. Joseph Lowry from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; Dr. Benjamin Hooks from the NAACP; Coretta Scott King; Judy Goldsmith; Phil Gerald, the Executive Director of the National Coalition of Black Gays, and myself. In the course of that conference call, we had each person struggling with what he or she had in the way of seeing the issue. At one point, Mrs. King said, "We're concerned about the constituency, many of whom are church folk. I'm afraid you're going too fast. I'm afraid they won't understand. I'm afraid we'll break this precious coalition we're trying to build that is so important." I said, "Letter from a Birmingham jail — 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.' Mrs. King, your husband wrote that letter to ministers who were also afraid that he was going too fast."

... And the next day was a press conference. Dr. Joseph Lowry came; Dr. Benjamin Hooks came; Coretta Scott King came; Judy Goldsmith came, and Congressperson Fauntroy came from the District of Columbia. Dr. Joseph Lowry read a statement that was signed by every one of those people, and the statement was: "In 1963, we had a march. A year later, we had the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It is time to amend that Act to include the rights of lesbians and gay men." That's the power of educating people... if we keep at it, we can appeal to the basic principles that people are dying to believe in themselves.

DE: I read that the National Gay Task Force was admitted to the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. Was that a long time coming? Were there previous attempts to be admitted that failed?

Apuzzo: I don't know the whole story of how difficult it was to get in. I know it was difficult. However, now that the National Gay Task Force and the Gay

Rights National Lobby are in, I have tried to make it my policy that we are there in coalition around things that are important even though they are not gay or lesbian per se. For instance, the Civil Rights Commission does not, will not, acknowledge gay and lesbian discrimination as part of its jurisdiction because we are not in the Civil Rights Act. However, I testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee and we endorsed the statement opposing Meese as the Attorney General which the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights did. What I'm trying to do is to be there on issues that are important and build a sense of confidence that we will not be interested only in our own issues. That's a slow process. It's a matter of building relationships and building trust. Even though we feel strongly that the Civil Rights Commission ought to deal with our issue, until such time that it does, it's an injustice that we will acknowledge and identify, but that doesn't mean that we're going to pick up our marbles and go home and leave our colleagues unsupported. So I emphasize the necessity to be there with them in solidarity.

DE: Is the Leadership Conference an advisory group?

Apuzzo: No, it's like a watchdog group that looks at civil rights and makes sure the structures of government are responsive to the spirit of civil rights legislation.

I am here to advocate our participation. Unless you do that, you're going to relegate the responsibility to somebody else. There are legions dying to take your place. Legions. I've met them. I know. I've watched Jerry Falwell talk to them. I know they're there.

I say that particularly to my brothers who are here. I say that to you, my brothers, with affection. Many of us, as women, knew early on, it's almost instinct — we knew from the beginning that politics wasn't a luxurious activity

that we could participate in when we felt like it. We knew that as women that we were disenfranchised from the system. When women make 59¢ on the dollar, when women are not in the Constitution, when instance after instance creates an echelon of second and third and fourth class citizenship in this country, those of us that occupy that position learn well that we must be part of that system, we must be part of making it responsive to our lives. It is a matter of survival. I say to you brothers, with love, that we must do it together.

FB: Could you comment on some of the difficulties that gay men and lesbians have working together, for example, charges that one group is not willing to get involved with the issues of the other group?

Apuzzo: I think one of the things that women, and I as a woman, are concerned about is that this movement can't be "make it okay for me to be gay, make it all right for me to have no other wrinkles in my life." For white males in a system that caters to white males, being gay is kind of an intrusion. And if the movement is just about making it okay to be gay, then what about us as women? What about us as feminists? What about us as poor people or people outside the margins for whatever reason? And that's why I think we must summon our movement to speak to the generic issue of oppression. We don't stop until we address all those issues. I think that women and Third World people, and the physically challenged, and the aged and the poor, often get the impression that some folks in the movement feel that the movement is about making it okay for them to be gay so that they can get on with their lives. It's incumbent upon us to summon ourselves to be the best that we can be. As I said about Adrienne Rich's definition of honor — what is the definition of honor? Is it honorable to get mine and go? I don't think so. I won't even deal with satisfying them that they've given me anything until we get it all. That's a fundamental issue.

If a legislator is a real champion of gay rights, but he or she isn't sensitive to the issue of choice, which is terribly important to lesbians as feminists, that's an issue. I'm not going to need to avail myself of that [abortion] personally in my life, but it's real important — a woman's right to determine what will happen to her body. We don't feel that men have enough commitment. If men would be willing to say, "Okay, I'm going to go to Joe Smith and say, 'Joe, you may have voted fine on gay rights, but we as men want you to know that this is our issue because we are of them. We are together; we are one.'" How much confidence would you inspire in us if you said, "Hey, we guys are going to get together and go speak to so-and-so legislator because we feel that it would be important to the women's community if we made it clear to him or her that this is an issue that concerns us as well." If you did that, you'd be the first community in the country to do it and you'd probably send shockwaves through the rest of the community in terms of summoning the gay male community to recognize how much we don't want to be hurt by you not understanding how important some of these things are to us.

When I get angry, sometimes it boils down to, "I'm with you 100%; be with me too. See what's important. See that this matters. Don't wait for us to hit you over the head with it. Love us enough to care, to pick up our banner. ERA is important to us. And if it gets introduced again, will you be there for us?" I think those are the things that women feel. I think that fundamentally women aren't sure that they can trust that you will be there.

... In the context of this movement, we have a few questions that we have to ask ourselves. Every year we talk about, with eloquence and exaltation, gay power. The question becomes, "What is gay power for?" Is it a movement whose purpose is to make it okay to be gay or lesbian? If it is, I retire now. If we are everywhere, and if we are everyone, if we are black people and brown people, and Asian people, and old people and young people, and physically-challenged people, and poor people and wealthy people, if we are everyone, then how is it that we could come to empower all of us? At this moment, we are faced with a challenge to answer the question, "What is the power for?" And, if it is to take the power, to get the power, that isn't enough. Our struggle is not complete until there is no more oppression... until we put ourselves on the line with all that oppression. If it is a movement that is committed to address the generic issues of oppression — the generic issue of oppression — if we are saying, "No more oppression, period" — not, "No more oppress us" — then we will have a movement of the most exciting political possibilities. That is what our movement must become.

We talk every year, once a year, about gay pride. And I'll suggest to you what I think the crossroad is about where pride is concerned. We can approach pride and make it so that it becomes gay smug. I mean it — gay smug. You know gay smug. You know how it walks, where it shops, how it dresses. Gay pride has more potential than to degenerate into gay smug.

DE: You talked a lot tonight about civil rights, but the other things you were talking about go far beyond civil rights and go to what I always feel is "gay liberation" — looking at the oppression that is everywhere and not stopping until it's all eradicated.

Apuzzo: Legislation is a vision of what you want society to be. They passed open housing in 1954 and we still don't have open housing in America. So legislation is not a reality. It is a vision of what you want society to be. But then you have to work to make the vision a reality.

DE: Somebody asked me to ask if you have any personal life. Do you get time to rest and play, or are you always on the run?

Apuzzo: A woman in Milwaukee asked me if it's true that I'm all work and no play. And I said, "I guess so."

I believe we are making history here. I believe that history is made by individuals like yourselves, in cities like Portland, in states like Maine. I believe that the future of this movement rests in your capacity to honestly believe just how important you are to this movement. And I beg you to believe that.

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Songs For My Children

By Chris

I have three children. Each is unique. Each brings different trials and different gifts to my life. For each child I have written a song. These are the lyrics.

Born mentally retarded, my oldest has the gift of an open heart...

The Heart of a Child

Be my teacher of courage and hope
Touch the sky
Be my teacher of love in this life
With your smile
Reaching out, the healer, arms open wide
You can fly
Peace on earth begins in the heart
The heart of a child

Rocking the baby to sleep comforts us both...

Lullaby

I'll wrap you in light
To hold you tonight
Sending you safely to dreamland
Drift off to sleep
Love is to keep
Quiet, I sit in wonder
Holding your outstretched hand.

In the process of adopting the middle child, a child quiet and withdrawn who has been seriously hurt, I tried to understand what the changes must be like. I wanted to welcome her...

Soft Shoe

Chorus:
It's a soft shoe, you do
Lost shoe, so blue
Waiting for so long
Tap dance and bow
You're wondering how
You'll make it through the next song

Verse 1:
In the mirror you gaze
You see yourself
All alone
The walls staring harshly
Stark white
When you cry
Echoes
Fill the room
With a moan
But there's no one home

Chorus

Verse 2:
Times are changing, they say
You're wondering
Where will you be?
A family that's waiting
Says yes
They want you
Heartbeats
Filled with hope
Filled with fear
Will they really be there?

Chorus

Verse 3:

Will they like you, could they
really love you
Just as you are?
Will they keep you and
Try?
Will they send
you back?
Will this be
Your last chance?
You begin a new dance.

It's a soft shoe, you do
Lost shoe, so blue
Waiting for so long
Your new life's here now
We're all learning how
Together we'll write the next song

Together, together
We'll write the next song

We can be family
Take my hand
Dance with me.

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Jerry's Banter

One of Webster's definitions of literature is that it is "writings having an excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest." I'm not sure just how old I was or what grade I was in when I first read Willa Cather's short story "Neighbor Rosicky." Was I in the 7th grade? Possibly. I do remember this was the first thing I ever read thinking — this is literature, not some tripe written for kids. A couple of years later I read her masterpiece *My Antonia*. Again I was impressed. Though the short story and novel are set on the Great Plains, and not in some mammoth city where I was growing up, she dealt with the experiences of East European immigrants, the only people I knew as a kid but had never read about before.

In the spring of 1979 I drove from Minneapolis, where I was living, to Santa Fe. With me was an old friend who, as a little boy, had known Willa well enough to be hauled up Mt. Monadnock by her and her lifelong companion Edith Lewis. Somewhere near Lincoln, Nebraska we decided that since we were only 90 miles from Red Cloud, the town where Willa grew up, we ought to visit the literary shrines there. It was bizarre. On that early spring morning Red Cloud was very quiet. In fact, we soon discovered it is deserted. As far as we could see nobody actually works or does business there anymore. What remains are the monuments to Willa and her family. The cottage she lived in from 1884 to 1890 is now open to the public. The largest brick building in town, the former bank, is a museum full of Cather family memorabilia. We drove away from Red Cloud sad that the town she knew so well as a girl had died.

Red Cloud is dead, but the prairie which provided Willa with her inspiration is still there. On that day we passed mile after mile of young wheat, rolling waves in a great inland sea. Occasionally we saw a lone farmhouse on the bare horizon.

My interest in Willa Cather and the world she wrote about has never waned. I have continued to reread her novels and books about her. Sometime in the '60s I read with surprise and joy Edith

Memoirs of Willa

Lewis' reticent memoir of her friend *Willa Cather Living*. For all its soft-spoken reticence this fag joyfully recognized a couple of dykes. It is a very different book from Phyllis C. Robinson's recently published *Willa; the Life of Willa Cather* (Doubleday, \$17.95). Ms. Robinson's book is both refreshing and dull. Refreshing because it treats Willa's two primary relationships, with Isabella McClung and Edith Lewis, in a mature way. Ms. Robinson attempts no psycho-analytical explanation for Willa's sexuality. Her biography offers testimony that woman loving woman is a valid choice any creative woman would want to make. Unfortunately, the biography is also tedious, in part, because Ms. Robinson pads her work with synopses of all Willa's novels and major short stories. Who was this book written for? The student who needs material for an exam or term paper, or the common reader (does such an animal still exist)? Each chapter is broken into short sub-chapters with its own title — a damn distracting practice. Maine readers and those interested in Maine literature will be fascinated, as I was, to read here a full account of the relationship of Willa and Sarah Orne Jewett and Sarah's "Boston Marriage" to Annie Fields. This is the first complete biography of Willa, sexuality and all. As mundane as it is, it should not be ignored.

Unlike the Lewis and Robinson books is *Willa Cather: A Pictorial Memoir*, photographs by Lucia Woods and text by Bernice Slote published by the University of Nebraska Press in 1973. This picture book captures in old family snapshots and awesome contemporary photographs the people and landscape Willa knew and used in her fiction. Willa Cather's imaginative world was one of subtle human relationships in settings of extraordinary physical reality — not only the Great Plains, but also Quebec and the Southwest. It is a disappointment to me that Willa never wrote a major novel about New England or the sea. She knew it well enough. In her later years, summers were spent on Grand Manan in a cottage she and Edith had built. Fall usually found her at the Shattuck Inn in Jaffrey, New

Hampshire. It is in Jaffrey that Willa wished to be buried when she died in 1947. Twenty-five years later Edith was placed beside her. The words from *My Antonia* are carved on Willa's gravestone: "... that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great."

In her lifetime Willa received many honors, including the Pulitzer Prize in 1923, and numerous honorary doctorates. The Nobel Prize which she richly deserved was denied her. For some unfathomable reason the first Nobel Prize for literature given to an American woman went to Pearl Buck (you say who was Pearl Buck) in 1938. So much for the infallible judgement of committees that give literary awards. Willa Cather's place in American history is best summed up in *Notable American Women*. She "recorded in her simple and elegiac novels the heroic final phase of frontier life in the American West. The body of Willa Cather's work is not large, but it has had much appeal. Its enduring quality is its tone of pathos, its commemoration of a recent past. It speaks for freshness, for youth, for the early morning of our civilization. Simple, human, vivid her fictions can be seen as the original work of a... novelist who captured the last phase of an heroic era."

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She grew up in Potter Valley, a small farming town in Northern California. She learned folk songs and songs from the labor movement. Her family listened to important musical artists of the time, including Judy Garland, Paul Robeson, Edith Piaf and the Weavers and Broadway musicals.

From age seven on she was a regular performer for teas and weddings and other community events in town. After high school Holly did summer stock in Carmel Valley, CA and then headed for Los Angeles where she spent a year studying theater and political science at UCLA. She joined then dropped out to perform in films, television and the theater, including a stint on Broadway in "Hair."

Wherever she performs — whether in clubs or on campuses, on the stages of major concert halls, or at huge outdoor rallies — her stunning voice and graceful intensity of her stage presence leaves audiences feeling renewed and energized, an event to be remembered.

Holly formed Redwood Records and recorded her first album in 1973 in response to requests for her music from people who had seen her on tour. Since then her six solo albums on Redwood have sold nearly a half-million copies — quite a feat for an independent label.

We are extremely fortunate to have this opportunity to see and hear Holly in concert at the University of Maine in Orono on Friday, April 13, 1984. At 8:15 p.m. at Lengyel Gymnasium. Tickets are \$7.50.

A Short Story

Since beginning to write I have shared some very personal information and experiences. It is an odd feeling to see your life in print, exposed to so many people. But I hear from others that it helps to read about experiences with which they can identify. And it helps me to share my experiences and feelings.

When I heard about this special edition on Gay Parenting in Our Paper, I came in touch with a lot of grief. I knew what the problem was and considered writing about it, but put it off. Today, the day before the paper is to be typeset, I am finally able to get it all down. It's hard to write about, but I think it's important. It's my parenting story. It's...

A SHORT STORY

In her declining years, my grandmother shared with me that the most painful experience of her life was the loss of a child (my uncle, who died at age 38). She told me that it was the cruelest thing that ever happened to her; the one thing that she was never able to understand. It was something she was never really able to let go of. There was such torture in her face as she spoke. Such pain. I felt I understood. But it was not until I had that experience myself that I came to truly know how deep the pain can be or how long it can last.

The story began with my meeting a woman my junior year in college. Her name was Logan and she was a reporter. She contacted me about doing an interview regarding my work with a blind student and his guide dog. I repeatedly assured her that the real story was about the student and his dog, but she per-

sisted in wanting to talk to me. I agreed to the interview. Modesty has its limits.

She arrived at the office one wet Monday evening, her waist-length brown hair dripping wet, her glasses steamed. Her Bean boots squeaked as she walked across the office floor, headed for a chair. She removed the yellow slicker that had protected her flannel shirt and jeans from the weather.

There was an immediate attraction between us. Something we never could pinpoint, but always remembered. We talked about the student and his dog and what it was like to be working with him. We then went on to share a few laughs and get to know each other better. Over the next few weeks we quickly became good friends. Over the following months, lovers.

"Scoop," a nickname she picked up from being a reporter, was a very beautiful woman. Physically attractive, warm, sensitive and loving. She was the fancy of many a man's eye. She was good for and to me. We shared a lot of interests and enjoyed each other's company. My parents adored her. And her mom loved to "dote on me." We'd sit and sip rum and cokes on the front porch and chat together at their home. The question (like with so many parents) was "when's the wedding?"

About 8 months into our relationship, Scoop and I were asked that question by a couple of other people; ourselves. We were in the position of becoming parents. She was pregnant. We talked a lot about what to do. Neither of us felt ready to marry. I knew that for me there

was something deep inside of me that knew it was not right, that it would not work. I loved her, but there was a tremendous knot in my stomach every time I thought about marrying her. I didn't want that. I didn't know why. I also did not want to face the other option, abortion.

I asked Scoop to carry our child to term and then give it to me to care for. I didn't feel ready for marriage, but felt I could handle parenting with some support from friends and family. In fact, I was excited about the possibility. She gave it some thought, but felt that the inconvenience and embarrassment were too much for her to bear. She wanted the pregnancy terminated.

At the time, 9 months of "inconvenience and embarrassment" seemed worthwhile to save a life. I felt that she was being extremely selfish. I could not believe that she would kill our child. At times I still feel that way, but overall I realize that I was asking for a lot. She was in an incredibly difficult position. She wanted to bear my child but the timing wasn't right. She knew there would not be "another chance."

We did not have a lot of time to make a decision about what to do, especially if she was to abort. We were young, scared and alone. We were very sad about what seemingly had to be. We went ahead with the abortion.

My anger and grief over this loss have always been very deep. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't think of him (the child). What would he have been doing now? What might have been? For a long time just the sight of an infant

made me sick. But I am now much more at peace with myself. The pain is there, but less. I guess a lot of my feelings came into play with the awareness of what the pit was in the bottom of my stomach when I thought of marrying Scoop; it was that I am gay.

Maybe if homosexuality hadn't been such a taboo, my feelings would have surfaced and been expressed earlier in life. Maybe this tragedy would never have happened. I don't mean to minimize my responsibility, but the societal pressures are great.

I wonder how many other men and women there are out there who have had similar experiences. I wonder how many lives have been lost to confusion or guilt regarding the sexual identity of their parents. I know for certain of one. That's more than enough for me. Believe me, it's awful.

There is a tremendous void in my life that will probably never be filled. One that probably only those who have experienced such a loss can understand. A part of me is missing. A seed was planted and the harvest never came. I never saw him or held him, but he was there and I loved him. It was a short story, but a story nonetheless.

I miss what might have been and live with what is.

Politiculture

By Nancy Brockway

Bent, a play about homosexual love destroyed and renewed under the Nazi oppression of gays, has returned to us some of our hidden history. It dramatizes, through the story of one man, the systematic imprisonment, torture, starvation and murder of tens if not hundreds of thousands of gay men under a regime determined to eliminate their "perversion." Sadly, it makes its point partly at the expense of the memory of the Jews so brutally persecuted by Hitler's Reich.

Bent effectively weaves bits of little-remembered history into the drama, so that we are educated about the vicious persecution of gay men under Hitler. For example, the myth that Nazis condoned or championed male homosexuality is exploded. The main character has picked up an SA "stormtrooper" at the bar on the night that Ernst Roehm, head of these paramilitary thugs who helped Hitler gain power, was murdered at Hitler's orders and his men murdered or imprisoned. This targets our hero and his lover for life among the hunted and dispossessed.

Resolving a power struggle between Roehm and the Army, Hitler had Roehm killed on the pretext that the SA leader was plotting a coup. Roehm and his SA officers were well-known but closeted homosexuals. But where Hitler had suppressed criticism of Roehm's homosexuality before he destroyed him, once Roehm was removed the Nazi campaign against homosexual "degeneracy" increased in shrillness.

In 1935, on the anniversary of Roehm's alleged plot, the criminal code was expanded to ban any "lewdness" between two men. Where homosexuality had been an offense since 1871 in Germany, now a kiss, a hug, or as little as a flirtatious look, all subjected the offender to 6 months in prison. The play accurately portrays a character's nervousness about being caught looking at men in the park; one Nazi court actually convicted a man for admitting that when he watched a heterosexual couple making love in a public park, he had only looked at the man.

Under this law, between 1937 and 1939 alone at least 24,450 men were convicted and imprisoned. Himmler reorganized the Gestapo to create a branch devoted entirely to combatting homosexuality and abortion. As early as 1934,

the Gestapo had been collecting names of persons suspected of homosexuality. In 1935, homosexuals were among the "degenerates" targeted for compulsory sterilization, which often meant castration. By late 1936, Himmler announced the plan of the Third Reich to eliminate homosexuality.

A queer was automatically sent to a concentration camp, where the prescribed living condition was "level 3," under which the average life expectancy was expressly limited; gays were among those categories of prisoners who were designated to be worked to death. Like the other inmates, they lived in cold and filth, were infested with vermin, plagued by disease, denied food, forced to stand long hours at attention in broiling sun or freezing winds and beaten to death for fainting or protesting, worked to death in quarries and clay-pits, randomly tortured, subjected to hideous "medical experiments," constantly in danger of murder at the hands of sadistic SS guards.

By the end of the war, the regime was keeping gays and others alive long enough to use their labor, sorely needed in the war effort. And gays were offered a chance to "volunteer" for dangerous assignment as front-line troops (on proving they could copulate with a woman!).

No one knows how many men went to concentration camps and ultimately their deaths as a result of the Nazi drive against queers. In addition to the 50,000 officially listed on extant camp records, it is estimated that an additional 170,000 to 450,000 gay men perished under Hitler.

At no time was lesbianism per se made criminal in Germany, although the idea was considered when the criminal code was expanded. A person did not end up in a concentration camp for being a lesbian. (There were, of course, lesbian relationships formed in the camps. Fania Fenelon describes such a bond in *Playing For Time*.)

The Nazi regime did heavily promote the notion that women should be solely devoted to "Kinder, Küche, Kirche" (children, kitchen, church). It promoted childbirth among Aryan women, married or not.

But what I'm about here is calling things as they were. The persecution of women as women or as lesbians was more indirect and less brutal than that faced by our gay brothers. After all, a

woman could still have babies, even if she didn't like sex with men. And propagation of the superior Aryan "race" was Hitler's obsession.

Here I must come back to the issue of anti-Semitism in this play. The protagonist Max supposedly avoided the worst of the camps had to offer by posing as a Jew. The implication of the plot is that in the pecking order imposed by the Nazis in the camps, Jews were better off than gays. That a Jew could pull less brutal work conditions. That a Jew would be given authority over a gay person. That a Jew could arrange for a gay man to be assigned to his detail. That when a Jew smuggled medicine to a gay man, the gay man would be singled out for punishment by the guards, and the Jew left alone.

From what I have read about the Holocaust, none of these statements is accurate. Nowhere in such books as *Schindler's List* by Thomas Keneally, *Playing For Time* by Fania Fenelon, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* by William Shirer, or *Surviving* by Bruno Bettelheim, which recount aspects of the Holocaust history, is there the slightest suggestion that Jews could command a better situation than homosexuals.

But our history has been buried, and not just by the Nazis, but by the anti-fascists and indeed other victims of Nazism. There is no monument to queers at Israel's Yad Vaashem. Some queers were kept in the camp by the liberating armies because, after all, they were "convicts." West Germany has refused gay victims of the Reich any compensation. Why shouldn't we believe that the right of gays to be recognized as the prime victims of Nazi oppression has been denied as well? The answer is that it just wasn't so.

At some level, to argue over who was more oppressed by the Nazis only serves to divide the victims. And it is difficult, given the lack of information about Nazi oppression of gays, to get a comprehensive picture of the relative position of gays and Jews. But there is some use in trying to explore the particular types of differences the play asserts existed. Two books that help immensely in this effort are *The Men With the Pink Triangle* by Heinz Heger (translated and with an introduction by David Ferbach, Alyson Publications, Inc., Boston, 1980), and *Hitler's Death Camps* by Konnilyn G. Feig (formerly at UMPG) (Holmes and Meyer, New York, 1981).

From these we learn that Hitler

imprisoned a variety of people, including, besides the Jews and gays, Gypsies, political opponents, "common criminals," Jehovah's Witnesses, "anti-socials," Poles, Russians, the mentally ill, and others. Each had to wear a distinctive triangular badge, color-coded to identify the major grouping to which one belonged. Jews wore the yellow Star of David. Gays wore pink triangles, which in at least one camp were larger than the other badges, so they would stand out and people would steer clear of the hated queers.

Numerous accounts recite that Hitler's most intense hatred was reserved for four groups: Jews, gays, Gypsies and Jehovah's Witnesses. Heger recounts that the gays were always called by insulting names, spat upon, and held up to the others as "the scum of the earth" (sound familiar?). But he and others note that the Jews were also vilified and derided more than others.

While Heger notes that homosexuals were subjected to special tortures, and segregated from the others, he and other authors also recount that Jews were kept in separate barracks, often with even less food and poorer sanitary conditions, if such is possible. Feig writes that in many camps the Jews were not sent out to work, but this only meant they were left to starve or held for gassing.

There is other evidence which reveals that, while gays may have been subject to worse conditions than most prisoners, the Jews were treated yet more brutally, if anything. So the central premise of *Bent's* second act, the relative safety of a Jewish identity in Hitler's death camps, is a gross distortion.

I might be inclined to forgive the error if another item in the play had not lent a further flavor of Jew-baiting. We are told that the first words to Max from his former landlord, a Jew, when landing in the same barracks as Max at the camp, are "You owe me the rent." We are also given to understand that the landlord tips off the guards to the fact that Max has smuggled medicine to his gay friend. Another betrayal lain at the feet of a greedy Jew.

It is crucial that we reclaim our history and that the Nazi evil not be forgotten. But it sickens me when we must vent our grief and anger at another victim, using the oppressor's stereotypes as a weapon against our fellow-sufferer. *Bent's* message is important, but the medium is deeply flawed.

Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right

CALENDAR

MEETINGS

Friday, March 30

"84 and Counting" — discussion of how gay Mainers can participate during this election year, Gay People's Alliance, 92 Bedford St., USM, Portland, 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, March 31

Boogie Bash — a dance jam space where one can move to a variety of inspiring dance music, People's Building, 155 Brackett St., 3rd floor, Portland, 8:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m., \$2.00 admission. Free cold spring water. Call 775-5658 for more information.

Friday-Saturday, March 30-31

Gay/lesbian voter registration drive, at the Underground, 3 Spring St., Portland, and at Cycles, 57 Center St., Portland and at the Gym, 117 Spring St., Portland.

Sunday, April 1

Tony Spotten, "Bal en Blanc, an Evening in White," Underground, 3 Spring St., Portland.

Tea Dance at Backstreet, 390 Commercial St., Portland, 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., benefit for *Our Paper*, \$2 at the door.

Michael Christopher in concert as Bette Midler — plus. Forefathers Inn, Kennebunkport, 8 p.m. Tickets are \$15 and \$6 (\$8 at the door). Call 934-4012 for more information.

Tuesday, April 3

Dr. George Pauk from Physicians for Social Responsibility will talk about Portland in the aftermath of a nuclear strike, First Parish, 425 Congress St., Portland, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, April 6

"Closets Are Health Hazards," film, Gay Peoples Alliance, 92 Bedford St., USM, Portland, 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, April 7

Teresa Trull and Barbara Higbie in concert at Colby College, Waterville, 8:00 p.m., Wadsworth Gym.

Legislative update on women's issues, South Parish Congregational Church, 9 State St., Augusta, 9:30-2:30.

Friday, April 13

Holly Near in concert, University of Maine, Orono, Lengyel Gym, 8:00 p.m.

DO'A — World Music Ensemble at State Street Church, 159 State St., Portland, 8:00 p.m., \$6.50.

Saturday, April 14

Special mid-month Boogie Bash dance jam, live music by the Lost Latinos led by Carlos on guitar, 8:30 p.m., People's Building, 155 Brackett St., Portland (3rd floor), \$3, free spring water, call 775-5658 for info.

Wednesday, April 18

Meeting of gay and lesbian delegates to the State Democratic Convention, at Our Books, 4 Pine St., Portland, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, April 20

"Gay Men Exploring Their Sexist Issues," Gay Peoples Alliance, open discussion, 92 Bedford St., USM, Portland, 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, April 21

"2084 Revue," by the Rhode Island Feminist Theater, USM, Portland campus, Luther Bonney Auditorium, 8:00 p.m.

Thursday, April 26

Meeting of gay and lesbian delegates to the State Democratic Convention, All Souls Unitarian Church, 11 King St., Augusta, 6:30

Friday, April 27

John Preston book-signing party, Our Books, 4 Pine St., Portland, 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, April 28

Boogie Bash dance jam, inspiring recorded music (rock, soul, jazz, disco, swing), 8:30 p.m., People's Building (3rd floor), 155 Brackett St., Portland, \$2, free spring water.

Sunday, April 29

Linda Tillery with Adrienne Torf in concert, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Picard Theater, 8:00 p.m.

MONDAYS

Feminist Spiritual Community — every Monday, 7 p.m., State Street Church, Portland.

Gay Health Action Committee — irregular Mondays, Portland — call 775-5540.

TUESDAYS

Greater Portland N.O.W. — fourth Tuesday of the month, Y.W.C.A., 87 Spring St., Portland, 7:30 p.m.

Gay/Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous — every Tuesday, open discussion meetings, 8 p.m., First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church, 425 Congress Street, Portland.

Our Paper staff meeting — every Tuesday, 7:30 p.m., Our Books, 4 Pine St., Portland. New members are welcome.

Alliance To Preserve Reproductive Choice — second Tuesday of the month, Y.C.W.A., 87 Spring St., Portland, 7 p.m.

WEDNESDAYS

Bowdoin Gay/Straight Alliance — first and third Wednesday, 7:30 p.m., Chase Barn Chamber, 256 Maine St. (above garage), Brunswick. Call 725-8731 ext. 633 (Scott) or write M.U. 367, Bowdoin College. Meetings held only when college is in session.

The Gay Parents Support Group meets Wednesday evenings at 7:30 p.m. at the USM Student Union, 92 Bedford St., Portland. For further information call (207) 780-4085 or (207) 772-4741.

THURSDAYS

Lesbian/Gay Alcoholics Anonymous — every Thursday, discussion meeting at 8 p.m., Unitarian Church, Main St., Bangor.

Gay/Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous — every Thursday, step meeting, 7:30 p.m., First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church, 425 Congress St., Portland.

FRIDAYS

"Free To Be" Gay/Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous — every Friday, 7:30 to 8:30, All Souls Unitarian Church, 11 King St., Augusta.

Gay People's Alliance — every Friday, 7 p.m., 92 Bedford St., Portland — open meetings (no meetings during school vacation).

Northern Lambda Nord — second Friday of the month — discussion group in New Sweden.

SATURDAYS

Interweave Bangor — third Saturday of the month, Unitarian Church, Main St., 6 p.m., potluck and meeting.

Gay/Lesbian Al-Anon — every Saturday, 8 p.m., First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church, 425 Congress St., Portland.

SUNDAYS

Northern Lambda Nord — last Sunday of the month — business meeting, 1:00 p.m. followed by potluck.

Wilde-Stein Club — every Sunday, 7:00 p.m., South Bangor Lounge, second floor, Memorial Union, Univ. of Maine, Orono.

Interweave Augusta — last Sunday of the month, All Souls Unitarian Church, 11 King St., 6:30 potluck and meeting.

Lesbian Support/Discussion Group 7:00-9:00 p.m. at 92 Bedford St., U.S.M. Sponsored by Women's Forum and GPA.



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Feminist Spiritual Community

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159 State St.
Portland 04101

Gay Health Action Committee
P.O. Box 10723
Portland 04104

Gay/Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous
c/o First Parish Unitarian Church
425 Congress St.
Portland 04101

Gay Parents Support Group
780-4085 or 772-4741
Portland

Gay People's Alliance
92 Bedford St.
Portland 04102
780-4085

Interweave
P.O. Box 215
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Maine Health Foundation, Inc.
P.O. Box 7329 DTS
Portland 04112

Maine Lesbian Feminists
P.O. Box 125
Belfast 04915

Mid-Coast Gay Men
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Camden 04843

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